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RECORD OF TELEPHONE INTERVIEW

The undersigned attorney for Applicant and Examiner Redding discussed the present application briefly during a telephone interview conducted on July 16, 2007. The parties discussed claim 1 and the main reference cited in the Official Action, Hipple, U.S. Patent No. 5,090,087. Applicant explained that Hipple discloses the type of prior art packing assembly described in the background of the subject application, which the present invention was designed to improve upon. Applicant suggested an amendment to claim 1 to more clearly point out the distinction between the present invention and the prior art packing assembly shown in Hipple. Examiner Redding tentatively agreed with Applicant's understanding of Hipple subject to his own reconsideration of the reference in view of the discussion.

REMARKS

Applicant thanks Examiner Redding for his careful review of the present application and the helpful approach taken during the telephone interview. Claims 1-24 are pending with claims 9-11 and 17 objected to but indicated as allowable. However, Applicant maintains that all of the claims, as concurrently amended to point out the distinction between the present invention and the packing unit described in Hipple, are in condition for allowance. Specifically, the amended independent claims explicitly state that the packing unit can be removed from the steam tube and spindle with the packing material intact in the housing. As noted above, the Hipple discloses the type of prior art packing assembly described in the background of the subject application, which the present invention was designed to improve upon. That is, the packing assembly described in the Hipple reference is not configured to be removed and installed from the steam tube and spindle as an integral unit with the packing material held intact. Rather, the packing unit described in Hipple is designed to be disassembled and re-packed with the steam tube and hub assembly remaining in place.

More specifically, the hub 50 cited in Official Action as corresponding to the removable packing unit claimed in the subject application is not actually a removable packing unit, but instead corresponds to what the present application refers to as the "spindle" that drives the lance tube rotationally and longitudinally on the steam tube. This is clear from the presence of the drive gear 52 on the hub as shown in Fig. 2 of Hipple and the description at col. 4, lines 26-32:

Hub assembly 50 is located within the carriage 18 and is employed to drive the lance tube 14 through its rotational and longitudinal movement. Hub assembly 50 is driven for rotation through bevel gear 52 and is supported by bearing assemblies 54 and 56 which support the hub assembly relative to the carriage structure 58.

Therefore, removing the bolt 68 and the collar 64, as suggested by the Office Action as part of the packing replacement process, is actually part of the process that allows the entire hub assembly to be removed, which is a major operation. In the sootblower described in Hipple, however, the packing material 78 is not replaced by removing the entire hub 50 with the packing material intact, as suggested by the Office Action. Rather, to remove the packing material, the collar 88 on the rear of the packing gland 84 is configured to receive a spanner wrench (see col. 5, lines 9-11), which allows the compression unit or gland 84 to be removed as a unit. But as shown in Fig. 2 of Hipple, the packing material 78 is not located within the compression unit or gland 84, but is instead located forward of the removable gland, between the bushings 74 and 76. As a result, once the gland 84 has been removed, the rear bushing 76 can then be removed to obtain access to the packing material 78, which is replaced while the hub 50 remains installed on the steam tube. See the description at col. 4, line 66 through col. 5, line 16, which describes the installation process.

The purpose of the present invention is to provide a packing unit that can be easily removed from the steam tube and spindle with the packing material intact, and without having to remove the entire spindle or hub assembly. This allows the packing unit to be removed and replaced quickly as an integral unit, and then taken to a bench where the spent packing material can be safely replace. This reduces the down time required for packing replacement and overcomes certain other problems encountered with the packing system described in Hipple, such as mechanics using system steam to blow the spent packing material from its location between the hub and steam tube, as described in detail in the subject application.

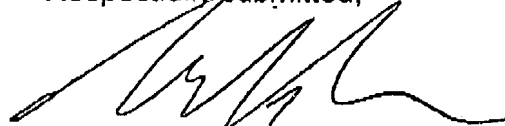
In view of this distinction, Applicant has amended the independent claims of the application to recite that the packing unit is configured to be removed "from the steam tube and spindle" with the packing material intact within the housing to more clearly point out the distinction between the present invention and the prior art packing assembly shown in Hipple to place the application in condition for allowance.

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CONCLUSION

It is believed that the preceding remarks are completely responsive to the Official Action mailed March 16, 2007, and that the claims are in condition for allowance. If the Examiner believes that there are any issues that can be resolved by a telephone conference, or that there are any informalities that can be corrected by an Examiner's amendment, please call Mike Mehrman at (404) 497-7400.

Respectfully submitted,



By: Michael J. Mehrman
Reg. No. 40,086

Mehrman Law Office, P.C.
5605 Glenridge Drive
Suite 795
Atlanta, GA 30342
404 497 7400
404 497 7405
mike@mehrmanlaw.com